

DRAFT Environmental Assessment
Proposed Land Acquisition and Trail Development--
Travelers' Rest State Park

April 20, 2012



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Appendix A. TRSP Map

Appendix B. TRSP Management Direction

1.0 PURPOSE OF AND NEED FOR ACTION

1.1. Proposed Action and Need

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) proposes to purchase via fee title a 23.69-acre, three-parcel addition to Travelers' Rest State Park (hereafter, TRSP, the Park, or Travelers' Rest) located near the town of Lolo, Montana from Bill and Ramona Holt (Figure 1). Included in the acquisition would be the park visitor center, museum and administrative office building, which are currently leased from the Holts. The community of Lolo is in Missoula County, about 8 miles south of Missoula. Travelers' Rest is located south of US Highway 12, just west of its junction with US Highway 93.

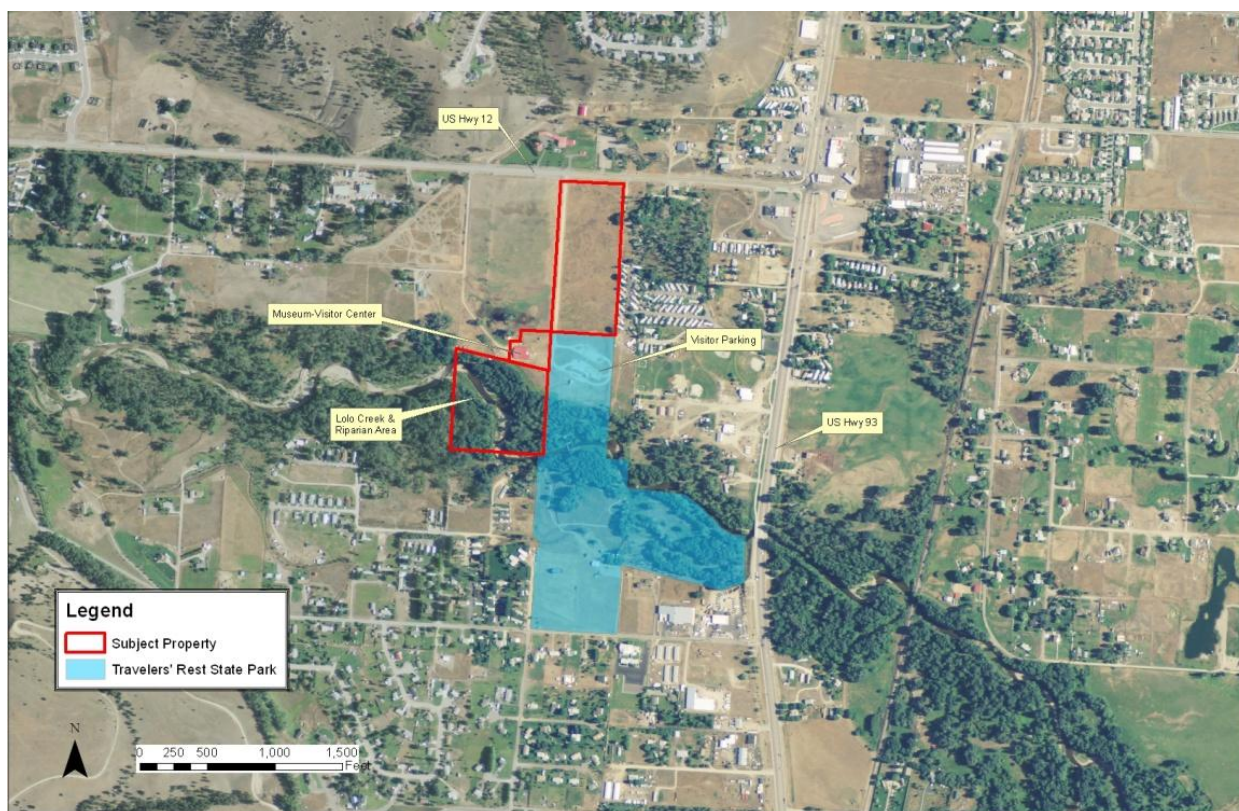


Figure 1. Outlined in red are the Travelers' Rest State Park parcels proposed to be acquired by FWP. The blue shaded areas are the existing lands owned by FWP.

If the acquisition is completed, FWP would also plan to expand the trail system within the park to connect to Lolo neighborhoods and existing nonmotorized trails within the community (Figure 2). Trails would be constructed with gravel, no more than 5 feet in width and designed to meet accessibility (Americans with Disabilities or ADA) standards. Where cultural resources could be impacted by ground disturbance, trail construction would involve placing a barrier on top of the existing surface, then adding and compacting gravel to complete the surface.

Travelers' Rest State Park was established in 2001 with a donation of 15 acres of land from The Conservation Fund. Additional acquisitions in 2002, 2004 and 2005 have increased the size of

the park to approximately 41 acres. FWP also holds a 10-acre conservation easement on one of the parcels (Parcel 3) of this proposed acquisition.

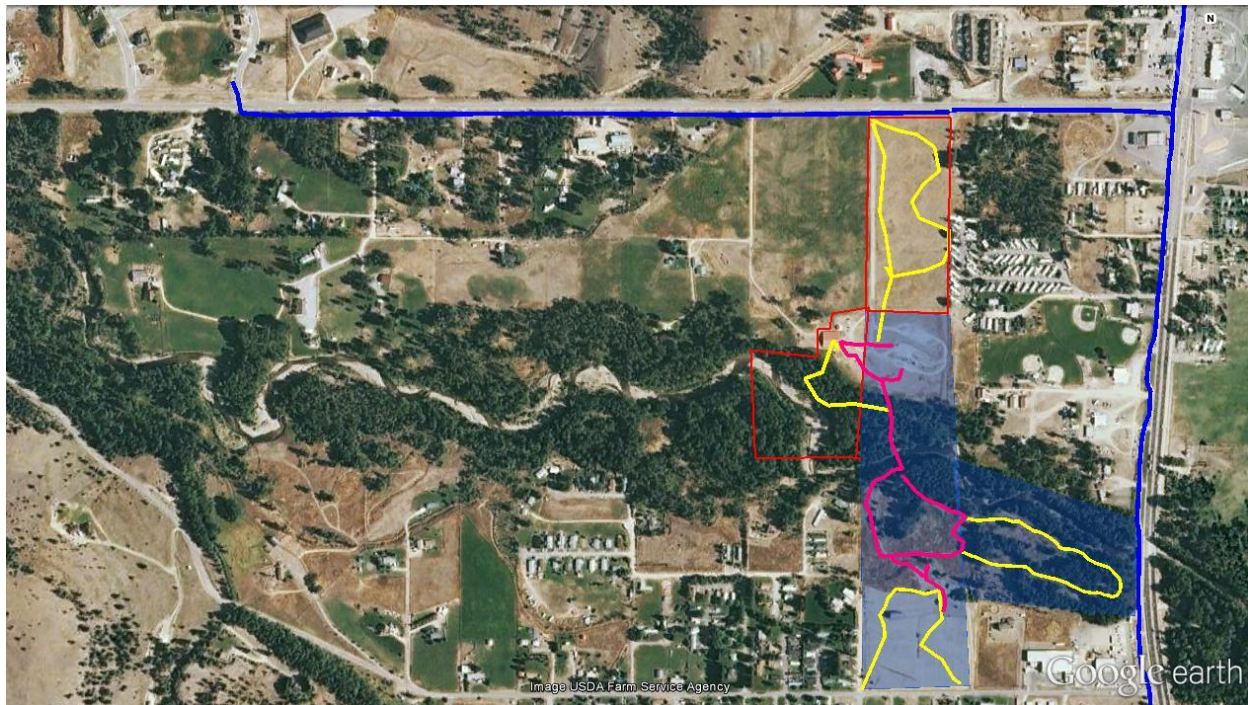


Figure 2. Proposed trail routes with Travelers' Rest State Park (TRSP). The pink lines indicate existing TRSP trails. Blue lines mark the nonmotorized trails following US Highway 93 east of TRSP and US Highway 12 north of TRSP. Yellow lines are proposed future trails within TRSP.

In 2001 and 2002, a unique research project identified and uncovered evidence of the use of the site by the Lewis and Clark Expedition during their stays here in 1805 and 1806. Based on this evidence, the Department of Interior relocated the Travelers' Rest National Historic Landmark (NHL) boundary to State Park lands and some private land on the south side of Lolo Creek.

The proposed acquisition includes the Holt Museum and Visitor Center at Travelers' Rest State Park, which is currently leased by FWP and houses exhibits related to the history of the area as well as the administrative offices for Travelers' Rest, Fort Owen and Painted Rocks State Parks.

This project would not only add the visitor center and museum to state ownership, but the additional lands would protect important riparian habitat along Lolo Creek; provide important and desired recreational access to the Lolo and western Montana community; and provide the opportunity to connect neighborhoods in the community as well as link existing nonmotorized recreational trails along both US Highways. The three parcels are (see Appendix A):

- Parcel 1, approximately 11 acres of open grazing land is between the existing park boundary and US Highway 12. The park entrance road passes through this parcel via a road easement granted to FWP by the Holts;

- Parcel 2 includes the visitor center and museum and affiliated parking lot. This is approximately 2.5 acres;
- Parcel 3 is south of Parcel 2 and comprised primarily of riparian lands along Lolo Creek. This parcel is approximately 10 acres.

Threats to these parcels include the potential for development of residential homes and/or commercial businesses in Parcels 1 and 2 because of their close proximity to Lolo and the main travel corridors of the highways.

The proposed action helps meet many of the objectives of the 2003 TRSP Management Direction (see Appendix B), including:

1. Providing for a series of paths (and associated educational materials) to illustrate natural ecosystems.
2. More land for recreational access and opportunity.
3. Fish and wildlife habitat protection.
4. Access to existing nonmotorized trails.
5. Buffer to the historic site.

1.2 Objectives of the Proposed Action

- Provide lasting public access to open and riparian lands;
- Create the ability to connect existing community nonmotorized trail systems through the park;
- Expand the trail system within the park to provide additional recreational access and educational opportunities to the community;
- Secure ownership of the park visitor center, museum and offices;
- Permanently protect riparian and wildlife habitat; and
- Preserve the park entrance from development.

1.3. Location

The Travelers' Rest acquisition parcels are located within the community of Lolo, approximately 8 miles south of Missoula, in Missoula County, Montana (Figure 1).

Legal Descriptions:

T12N, R20W, Sec. 34. Tract 3A-1 in E2 and Plat C2, Parcel 001 in NE ¼

1.4 Relevant Plans

Travelers' Rest State Park Management Direction (2003) identifies the plans to develop and create Travelers' Rest State Park.

Lolo Regional Plan serves as a planning guide for local officials and citizens, which was adopted in 2002 and amended in 2010. Missoula County is currently reviewing the document based on stakeholders' concerns regarding growth in the planning area.

Missoula County Parks and Conservation Lands Plan is meant to guide citizens, the County Park Board, and the Board of County Commissioners in their work to improve and maintain park lands within Missoula County (1997).¹

1.5 Authority and Responsibility

FWP has the authority to purchase lands that are suitable for game, bird, fish or fur-bearing animal restoration, propagation or protection; for public hunting, fishing, or trapping areas; and for state parks and outdoor recreation per Montana state statute § 87-1-209, Montana Code Annotated (MCA).

FWP is also required to deposit 20% of the purchase price, capped at \$300,000/acquisition, for properties it acquires (§§ 87-1-209 and 23-1-127(2), MCA). Such an account would be used for weed maintenance, fence installation or repair of existing fences, garbage removal, implementation of safety and health measures required by law to protect the public, erosion control, streambank stabilization, erection of barriers to preserve riparian vegetation and habitat, and planting of native trees, grasses, and shrubs for habitat stabilization. Such maintenance activities should be consistent with the Good Neighbor Policy (23-1-126 MCA).

2.0 ALTERNATIVES

2.1. Alternative A--Proposed Action: FWP would purchase three parcels totaling 23.69 acres and the visitor center and museum and would expand the park trail system

FWP proposes to acquire via fee title, approximately 24 acres in Lolo, including visitor center and museum for the Park and an extensive collection of artifacts and exhibits related to the history of the area. FWP would provide \$300,000 towards the expected \$700,000 purchase price.

The acquisition would be funded from four sources: Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF); the Missoula County Open Space Bond Fund; a private, community fundraising campaign; and a generous and significant sale discount from the landowners.

FWP would provide \$300,000 in federal LWCF funds for the project. The LWCF program provides matching grants to States and local governments for the acquisition and development of public outdoor recreation areas and facilities. The program is intended to create and maintain a nationwide legacy of high quality recreation areas and facilities and to stimulate non-federal investments in the protection and maintenance of recreation resources across the United States.

The Missoula Board of County Commissioners has approved funding of up to 30% of the appraised value of the land not to exceed \$300,000 for this project. An appraisal would be completed in the spring of 2012. The Missoula Open Space Bond Fund was established by the

¹ The Missoula County Park Board has recommended that the Missoula County Commissioners adopt a new *Missoula County Parks and Trails Plan*. Action on that plan is expected in the spring of 2012. For Lolo the Draft Plan states “The most fruitful community trail projects would be...explore connections within the community such as from Mormon Creek Road to existing trail on Highway 93 and Travelers’ Rest State Park.”

voters of Missoula County in November, 2006. This program designated \$10 million (divided equally between the City of Missoula and Missoula County) to implement the purposes of the bond. Bond funds are used to preserve fish and wildlife habitat, protect agricultural lands, and provide recreational access to Missoula County residents. Because the bond funds must be used for preserving open space and recreational access, a deed restriction would be added at closing. This deed restriction would acknowledge that FWP would manage the land consistent with bond purposes.

The remaining estimated \$100,000 would come from other sources, primarily a community fundraising effort spearheaded by the Travelers' Rest Preservation and Heritage Association (TRPHA). TRPHA is the non-profit partner of TRSP, and the organization has been integral to the preservation and development of the Park.

The Holt family would complete the transaction by donating the remaining value of the land and building, as well as the Holt collection of artifacts and exhibits in the museum. The value of the land, building and collection is estimated at \$1.5 - \$2 million. Therefore, the Holts' contribution towards FWP ownership of the land would be in the range of \$1 million.

If the land is acquired, FWP would begin to further develop the trail system within the Park, connecting neighborhoods and existing nonmotorized trails throughout the Park. This would be very important for Parcel 1. In the fall of 2011, Missoula County completed an extension of the nonmotorized trail parallel to US Highway 12, which has already contributed to a significant increase in pedestrian use along the Park entry road. For visitor safety, trail construction along the entry road would be a high priority.

FWP proposes a series of trail routes within the park to provide connection to neighborhoods and other trails, as well as create trail loops within and outside the park boundary. It is not expected that all trails would be constructed in the near future, but priorities would be established to address the trails as funding and other opportunities become available. The first priority would be to connect the park to the Highway 12 trail (Figure 2).

Challenges for FWP related to the proposed acquisition include:

- Long-range operation and maintenance of the parcels and buildings;
- ensuring adequate levels of funding for trail development and access; and
- enforcement of FWP rules throughout the parcels for protecting public safety, park facilities, and resource values.

Anticipated immediate expenses include the installation of appropriate signage (FWP identification, public use rules and regulations, etc.), ongoing noxious weed management, fence removal, and trail construction.

2.2 Alternative B--No Action: FWP would not purchase three Travelers' Rest State Park parcels and the visitor center/museum

Under the No Action Alternative, FWP would not purchase the three parcels, including the visitor center and museum building from the Holts. It is assumed that the Holts would look for

other buyers for the parcels, with an eye to develop Parcel 1, most of which has been identified as suitable for 4 dwellings per acre by the Lolo Regional Plan. It is also quite possible that without the long-term commitment that the Holts may look to sell or lease the visitor center and museum to an interested commercial interest, thereby leaving TRSP without the ability to provide essential services to the public or office space for park employees. This loss of the visitor center and museum could mean that staff would need to be re-assigned to alternative work stations. This could leave the park open to increased vandalism on existing lands. Or, FWP would need to request funding for a visitor center from which to manage this National Historic Landmark.

Additionally, the 10 acres of riparian land would not be as easily accessible to the public for fishing or other recreational access, and the community would not have the expanded trails proposed in this project.

2.3 Alternative Considered but Eliminated from Further Analysis--Conservation Easement

This alternative was not investigated since the Holts are only interested in selling the parcels.

3.0 AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT AND ENVIRONMENT CONSEQUENCES

3.1 LAND USE

Parcel 1 has been used for agricultural purposes for at least the last century. Currently, this land is grazed on a rotating basis by the Holts. The land is irrigated, and the associated water rights would be transferred to FWP if it obtains the land.

Until 2008, Parcel 2 was also used primarily for agricultural purposes, associated with a small house located adjacent to the subject property. In 2008, the Holts began an expansion of a building on the property that eventually grew to be the visitor center and museum currently leased by FWP.

Parcel 3 is part of the Lolo Creek riparian system and is largely intact as such with a multi-tiered understory and a healthy cottonwood forest over-story.

Proposed Action: Under FWP ownership, Parcel 1 would remain as open space and would be managed for light recreational use (hiking, wildlife viewing, etc.) as part of TRSP. A trail would be constructed along the entry road to connect the park to the Highway 12 pedestrian trail. Long-term plans may include a more extensive trail system through this parcel (with associated interpretation) and a possible native prairie restoration project. With the deed restriction in place, development beyond trails and signage would be prohibited.

FWP would manage Parcel 2 in conjunction with the visitor center and museum. This would allow for parking, picnic areas, signage and park information. The visitor center and museum would continue operations consistent with current management, providing park information to visitors, a space for interpretive and educational programs, and community events. Additionally,

existing native plant beds established in 2010 could be used as a seed source for future restoration efforts at Travelers' Rest.

Parcel 3 would be managed for its high value as fish and wildlife habitat. Eventually a small trail could be constructed through the parcel to allow for more recreational access to the stream, wildlife viewing, and natural history education. A conservation easement was donated to FWP by the Holts in 2005. That easement prohibits any development other than trails and associated signage. FWP expects to transfer the conservation easement to the Five Valleys Land Trust prior to closing.

A search of the Montana Bureau of Mines and Geology Abandoned and Inactive Mines database for Missoula County did not identify any old hard rock mines (gold, silver, etc.) within any of the parcels. All mineral interests attached to the parcels would be transferred to FWP.

The Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) water rights database identifies 2.5 cfs as part of the larger 40-acre parcel from which FWP would acquire its 23.69 acres. FWP would receive a proportionate share of these rights at acquisition.

Any existing road easements attached to the parcels would transfer to FWP.

No Action: Under the No Action Alternative, FWP would not acquire the land. The Holts would be free to explore other land use options, including developing the property or seeking another buyer who may develop the property for residential or commercial purposes.

3.2 Aesthetics and Recreation Opportunities

Although Travelers' Rest is a cultural park, its location on Lolo Creek, within the community of Lolo and situated along the commuter corridor connecting Missoula with the Bitterroot Valley has meant that the fastest growing segment of visitation is recreational use by local residents. Acquisition of these parcels would allow FWP to better provide and manage this use.

Historically, all the parcels have been in open space, albeit in private ownership. As Lolo has grown over the years many of the open lands contiguous to the community have been developed, leaving a patchwork of ownership with little recreational access to Lolo Creek or other public lands.

There is little public access to Lolo Creek between Lolo Creek Campground and the confluence with the Bitterroot River (approximately 15 miles). Access to the rich fishery of Lolo Creek is a need for the community and the many visitors to the area.

Another growing segment of TRSP users are local residents who use the existing trail to walk or bike, either for exercise and/or to view the wildlife that inhabits the park. While there are many such opportunities in the greater Missoula area, there are few places in Lolo where residents can access natural areas easily.

Another community need is an alternative route to Lolo School for children who reside in the neighborhoods south of Travelers' Rest. Currently many of those children use Mormon Creek Road, which lacks a shoulder and is heavily traveled by motor vehicles.

Finally, schoolchildren from throughout the region would benefit from the increased education opportunities. Working in cooperation with TRPHA, more than 2,000 students from approximately 20 communities take part in place-based education at Travelers' Rest each year. The addition of these parcels would not only secure a year-round weatherproof facility for additional programs, but the lands in this proposal provide rich opportunities to increase the program offerings that are focused on Lewis and Clark history, Native American history of the area and natural history.

Proposed Action: With acquisition of these parcels, FWP would further meet the plans and ideals developed in the early phases of park planning and described in the Travelers Rest State Park Management Direction (Appendix B).

Parcel 1 would allow for trail linkages to existing trails and would connect communities, including providing a safe alternative route to Lolo School and the main part of town for those who live in the Mormon Creek Road area south of the park. Construction of a trail parallel to the entry road through this parcel would be a high priority for FWP if the acquisition is completed.

Parcel 3 protects high-value riparian area that is important to the Lolo Creek watershed. In addition to mink, beaver, river otter, muskrat, moose, white-tailed and mule deer, mountain lion, black bear, fox, coyote and bobcat, more than 125 species of birds have been documented on site. While protecting the cottonwood forest, this parcel would also greatly increase the recreational access at the park. When combined with other FWP lands at the park, approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ mile of Lolo Creek frontage would be accessible to the public for fishing and recreating (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Lolo Creek in the proposed acquisition area (Parcel 3) for Travelers' Rest State Park.

The proposed acquisitions are expected to benefit a large number of visitors to the park, due to its location within the community. With visitation more than 20,000 per year and increasing, FWP anticipates addition of these parcels would encourage more nearby residents to use the park for recreation.

FWP would continue with the management of the parcels for open year-round nonmotorized recreation appropriate at a cultural site. Firewood cutting, off-road motorized use, horse riding, hunting and camping would be prohibited.

The purchase of Parcels 1 and 2 would protect them from potential commercial and/or residential development and would ensure the park entrance would maintain the open character of the park. The acquisition of the parcels by FWP would also provide buffer zones between developed areas and wildlands for the benefit of wildlife species.

With the location of the park in an urban area and limited resources, there would be challenges associated with managing recreation on the property. These challenges could be related to: public safety, law enforcement coverage, vandalism, maintenance, noxious weed management, and resource protection. FWP has a year-round site manager based at the park, as well as seasonal employees and a strong cadre of volunteers who provide everything from visitor information to park maintenance.

Recreation would continue to be managed in accordance with applicable FWP rules and regulations, including the Parks Biennial Fee Rule, Commercial Use Administrative Rules, and Commercial Use Permit Fee Rule. FWP would install appropriate boundary, entry and regulation signage, and additional site information would be available via brochures and FWP's Montana State Parks website (<http://stateparks.mt.gov>) to inform the public of the recreational opportunities and activities within the park.

No Action: If FWP decides not to purchase the parcels, the Holts would possibly search for other buyers. Public recreational opportunities afforded by these properties would likely be lost.

3.3 Vegetation

Parcels 1 and 2 are largely comprised of introduced short grasses commonly found on agricultural land in west-central Montana. Parcel 3 is a functioning cottonwood riparian area. The dominant overstory is black cottonwood (*Populus trichocarpa*), with much understory of alder (*Alnus spp.*), common snowberry (*Symphoricarpos albus*), woods rose (*Rosa woodsii*), willow (*Salix spp.*), and red-osier dogwood (*Cornus sericea*). The elevation of the parcels is approximately 3200 feet throughout.

Invasive weed species are present in limited areas within all the parcels. Exotic weed species include spotted knapweed (*Centaurea maculosa*), leafy spurge (*Euphorbia esula*), common hound's-tongue (*Cynoglossum officinale*), and Canada thistle (*Cirsium arvense*).

Proposed Action: FWP acquisition of the proposed parcels for Travelers' Rest would preserve the existing vegetation within the riparian area of Parcel 3 and provide opportunity for future grassland restoration activities on Parcels 1 and 2.

If FWP were to acquire these parcels, FWP would manage noxious weeds in accordance with the FWP's Integrated Noxious Weed Management Plan (2008) and the FWP Region 2 Parks Division Weed Management Implementation Plan (2010). In accordance with § 7-22-215, MCA, FWP is required to have the property inspected and to develop a site-specific noxious weed management plan agreement in cooperation with the local weed district. Any isolated patches of invading species would be eradicated by the most efficient and effective means (e.g., hand-pulling, digging and/or herbicide spot treatment), depending on weed species and site limitations. FWP's priority for herbicide control of noxious weeds on the subject lands would be to spray roadsides and previously disturbed areas. Roadsides and trail edges would be inspected annually for the purpose of detecting and eradicating any new weed introductions before infestations become established. As an additional preventive measure, FWP would confine motorized traffic to the existing road system and would otherwise avoid disturbance of the soil surface.

No Action: If the Holts retained ownership of the parcels, little would change for now. Parcels 1 and 2 would continue to be used for agricultural purposes in the short-term. If the parcels were sold, the exact level of this risk is unknown since the future impacts to resources and public access would be dependent on the desires of the property's new owner(s). It is difficult to predict how new ownership would affect existing vegetation and wildlife habitat resources, since actual landowner activities are unknown. There is the potential for residential and/or commercial development, which could negatively impact habitat for wildlife species and the open space feel of the park.

3.4 Wildlife Species

Despite the location in the urban interface with the Lolo community, Travelers' Rest State Park and the proposed acquisition parcels provide habitat for a wide diversity of species. To date, more than 125 species of birds have been documented on site, most of them in the cottonwood riparian area along Lolo Creek. Mule and white-tailed deer frequent the proposed acquisition, as well as an occasional moose and elk.

There is considerable evidence of furbearers and other mammals throughout the Park and proposed parcels. River otter, mink, muskrat, bobcat, black bear, mountain lion, fox and coyote have been observed or known to use the area on a regular basis.

In general, riparian areas are critical habitat for many bird species. Riparian areas and wetlands comprise approximately 4% of Montana's land mass, yet support more than 80% of all bird species found in the state. The riparian area along Lolo Creek in the proposed acquisition area provides a rich source of food and cover for the diversity of bird species found here. It also provides a critical link to the Bitterroot River Important Bird Area (IBA), which borders the park property to the southeast.

Table 1 lists Montana Species of Concern (SOC) and Threatened/Endangered species (US Fish and Wildlife Service status under the Endangered Species Act) that have been observed on the property or are predicted to occur within the vicinity².

Table 1. Montana Species of Concern (SOC) and Threatened/Endangered Species observed or expect to occur on the lands proposed for acquisition by FWP.

Common name <i>Species</i>	Status*	Habitat	Status in Vicinity of Parcels
<u>Species of Concern</u>			
Bull Trout <i>Salvelinus confluentus</i>	Threatened, SOC, Tier 1	Mountain streams, rivers, and lakes	Uses Lolo Creek in Parcel #3 as a migratory corridor.
Westslope Cutthroat Trout <i>(Oncorhynchus clarki lewisi)</i>	Sensitive, SOC, Tier 1	Coldwater streams	Uses Lolo Creek in Parcel #3 as a migratory corridor.
Fisher <i>(Martes pennant)</i>	SOC, Tier 2	Mixed conifer forest	The area has low quality fisher habitat.
Hoary Bat <i>(Lasiurus cinereus)</i>	SOC, Tier 2	Conifer and riparian forests	Suitable habitat, no surveys have been done to document presence/absence.
Fringed Myotis <i>(Myotis thysanodes)</i>	SOC, Tier 2	Riparian and dry mixed conifer forests	Suitable habitat, no surveys have been done to document presence/absence.
Bald Eagle <i>(Haliaeetus leucocephalus)</i>	Delisted, SOC, Tier 1	Riparian forests	Birds present and use all of the parcels for foraging
Clark's Nutcracker <i>(Nucifraga Columbiana)</i>	SOC, Tier 3	Conifer forests	Birds present & probably use all of the parcels.
Flammulated Owl <i>(Otus flammeolus)</i>	SOC, Tier 1	Low-mid elevation conifer forests with large trees	Suitable habitat, but not yet verified on site.
Great Blue Heron <i>(Ardea Herodias)</i>	SOC, Tier 3	Riparian woodlands	Birds present and use Parcel #3 frequently for foraging.
Northern Goshawk <i>(Accipiter gentilis)</i>	SOC, Tier 2	Mixed conifer forests	Birds present and use all of the parcels.
Pileated Woodpecker <i>(Dryocopus pileatus)</i>	SOC, Tier 2	Moist conifer forests	Birds present and use Parcel #3 extensively.
Lewis's Woodpecker <i>(Melanerpes lewis)</i>	SOC, Tier 2	Riparian forest	Birds present and documented breeding in Parcel #3.
Clark's Nutcracker <i>(Nucifraga Columbiana)</i>	SOC, Tier 3	Conifer forest	Birds observed on site.
Veery <i>(Catharus fuscescens)</i>	SOC, Tier 2-3	Riparian forests, shrubby habitats	Birds present, primarily in Parcel #3.
Golden Eagle <i>(Aquila chrysaetos)</i>	SOC, Tier 2	Grasslands	Birds present and use all of the parcels for foraging.
Cassin's Finch <i>(Carpodacus cassinii)</i>	SOC, Tier 3	Drier conifer forest	Birds observed on site.
Bobolink	SOC, Tier 3	Moist grasslands	Suitable habitat, but not yet verified

² Montana Natural Heritage database. Available <http://mtnhp.org/SpeciesOfConcern/?AorP=a>. Accessed 22 February 2012.

Common name Species	Status*	Habitat	Status in Vicinity of Parcels
(<i>Dolichonyx oryzivorus</i>)			on site.
Harlequin Duck (<i>Histrionicus histrionicus</i>)	SOC, Tier 1	Mountain streams	Birds verified using Parcel #3.
Brown Creeper (<i>Certhia Americana</i>)	SOC, Tier 2	Mixed conifer forests	Birds verified using Parcel #3.
Western Skink (<i>Eumeces skiltonianus</i>)	SOC, Tier 2	Rock outcrops	Suitable habitat, not verified.
<u>Potential Species of Concern</u>			
Barrow's Goldeneye (<i>Bucephala islandica</i>)	PSOC, Tier 3	Wetlands	Documented to occur in the area during migration.
An Ice Crawler (<i>Grylloblatta campodeiformis</i>)	PSOC		Unknown due to its nocturnal habits and activity at temperatures just above freezing.

*Tier 1 status identifies those species in greatest conservation need. PSOC are Potential SOC.

Proposed Action: FWP acquisition of the Travelers' Rest State Park parcels would protect riparian resources, which are important migratory corridors for songbirds, small mammals, amphibians and aquatic species. Preserving these parcels would also provide a small wildlife corridor connecting the Carlton Ridge area to the south and the Blue Mountain area to the north.

Parcel 1 includes highly desirable lands for residential or commercial development. The location along Highway 12 and just ¼-mile west of Highway 93 would likely make this land more desirable as time goes by.

FWP would manage these parcels for nonmotorized recreation opportunities appropriate in cultural parks. No impacts are expected to wildlife species if the proposed action is approved.

No Action: If no action were taken by FWP, the Holts may look to sell or develop the land in Parcels 1 and 2.

If the parcels were sold to a buyer for development, then the subject lands would be put at greater long-term risk of residential and/or commercial development and important local habitat for a host of game and nongame wildlife species might be impacted. Furthermore, easy public access to the park and the connectivity of neighborhoods could be lost. Exact level of risk of loss of habitat and public access are unknown, since they are dependent on the desires of the new property owner(s).

3.5 Fisheries Species and Water Resources

Lolo Creek originates near Lolo Pass on the Montana/Idaho border and flows 37 miles east to its confluence with the Bitterroot River. The Lolo Creek watershed drains 265,000 acres and is a main tributary to the Bitterroot River.

Historically, the stream hosted a prolific fishery of westslope cutthroat and bull trout. Although those populations have declined, Lolo Creek remains as important habitat for these species. This lower section of Lolo Creek is important migratory habitat for these species of concern, connecting the remnant populations of westslope cutthroat and bull trout to the Bitterroot River.



Figure 4. Lolo Creek in the proposed acquisition area (Parcel 3) for Travelers' Rest State Park

Floodplain: Nearly the entirety of Parcel 3 is identified as floodplain by US Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) floodplain map database.

Water Rights: A search of the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) water rights database identified 2.5 cfs as part of the larger 40-acre parcel from which FWP would acquire its 23.69 acres. FWP would receive a proportionate share of these rights at acquisition.

Proposed Action: FWP acquisition of Parcel 3 would add more than 900 feet of Lolo Creek frontage to Park lands, bringing the total creek frontage in the park to approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ mile. The acquisition would assist in stream preservation and restoration efforts for the Lolo Creek and Bitterroot River watersheds.

In recent years, millions of dollars of public and private funds have been used to acquire former Plum Creek Timber Company lands in the upper Lolo Creek drainage. A key part of the success of the investments is to connect the migratory fish routes to the Bitterroot River, and the acquisition of Parcel 3 can be an important component in that success.

The project would have no negative impacts on fisheries habitat, fish passage or aquatic species.

No Action Alternative: If FWP decides not to purchase the parcels, it is unknown how fisheries and water resources (riparian areas) would be affected by future ownership or management.

3.6 Soils

The soils through most of the existing park properties, as well as the parcels proposed for acquisition, have been associated with the Lolo Creek bottom at some time in the past few centuries.

A search of the Natural Resources Conservation Service Web Soil Survey found that most of Parcels 1 and 2 are categorized as Moiese gravelly loam, a well-drained soil. The soils in Parcel 3 are identified as Xerofluvents, a soil found in frequently flooded areas such as the riparian area along Lolo Creek.

The soils in the existing park lands are identified as Perma gravelly loam, a somewhat excessively drained soil, on the upper terrace, and as Riverrun-Gash complex soils on the lower terrace south of Lolo Creek. These soils are also fairly well drained.

Proposed Action: FWP acquisition of these lands would not be expected to have any significant impact on the soils. Future trail development could have minor impact to the soils, although due to the well-drained nature of the soils it is likely that those impacts would be minimal. Additionally, any trail construction in archeologically sensitive areas would be done with little or no ground disturbance, which would also protect the soils.

No Action Alternative: If FWP does not purchase the parcels, it is unknown how soils would be affected by future ownership or management.

3.7 Air Quality

Proposed Action: FWP acquisition of these lands would have no long-term impact on existing or future air quality in the surrounding area. Future trail development could have temporary and minimal impact to air quality during trail construction.

No Action Alternative: If FWP does not purchase the parcels, it is unknown how air quality would be affected by future ownership or management.

3.8 Noise and Electrical Effects

Proposed Action: FWP acquisition of these lands would not be expected to have negative impact on existing or future noise levels in the surrounding area. All vehicles would be

restricted to existing roads within the park. Existing utility easements would not be impacted by this acquisition.

No Action Alternative: If FWP does not purchase the parcels, it is unknown how noise would be affected by future ownership or management, but future development of Parcel 1 could lead to increased noise levels within the community.

3.9 Cultural and Historic Resources

FWP believes the entire human history of western Montana could be embodied at Travelers' Rest State Park.

The Lewis and Clark Expedition arrived on the banks of Lolo Creek (named "Travellers Rest" by Meriwether Lewis) on September 9, 1805. Here they camped before turning west on September 11, following an ancient trail over the Bitterroot Mountains in the most perilous part of their journey. The Expedition returned to Travelers' Rest on June 30, 1806 and stayed until July 3. On that day, the two leaders split the party in order to explore more of present-day Montana, remaining apart for nearly six weeks before reuniting near the confluence of the Missouri and Yellowstone Rivers.

A unique archeological research project in 2001-2002 verified the location of the Lewis and Clark Expedition campsite of September 9-11, 1805 and June 30-July 3, 1806. To date, this is the only scientifically confirmed Lewis and Clark campsite in the United States. The US Department of Interior moved the boundaries of the Travelers' Rest National Historic Landmark to the Park in 2006.

Prior to the arrival of Euro-Americans, however, the area around present-day Lolo was the homeland of the Bitterroot Salish people. Known in their culture as Tmsm, à (No Salmon), the area along Lolo Creek was an important gathering spot for the exchange of commerce and culture for the Salish and their allies, the Pend d'Oreille, the Nez Perce and others.

The Hellgate Treaty of 1855 included a provision that all lands "above the Loo-lo Fork" (south of Lolo Creek) be examined and perhaps set aside as a reservation for the Salish tribe. Although no such survey was completed, the Federal government opened the Bitterroot Valley to settlement. Many Salish peacefully remained in the valley until agricultural settlement precluded their traditional lifestyle. The last main band of Salish left the ancestral homelands of the Bitterroot Valley in 1891.

In 1854, Captain John Mullan traveled to what was called the "Lou Lou Fork" (Lolo Creek) making a cursory exploration of the Lolo Trail ("a good road is found for twenty miles up the stream, partly through prairie and open forest"). Gustav Sohon, an artist with Mullan's party, created a sketch of the area that captures the first known image of what is today Lolo and Travelers' Rest (Figure 5).



Figure 5 *Entrance to the Bitterroot Mountains by the Lou Lou Fork* by Gustav Sohon. Travelers' Rest is along the low line of hills to the right.

The earliest homesteads in the area were near present day Travelers' Rest in the 1880s. A large barn on the park grounds dates to the mid 1920s, a rustic reminder of Montana's agricultural roots.

FWP, in cooperation with the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), TRPHA, the Travelers' Rest Chapter of the Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation, and the Confederated Salish Kootenai Tribes developed a Cultural Resources Management Plan (CRMP) in 2006. Any lands added to the park would be managed in accordance with the CRMP.

Proposed Action: FWP's proposed acquisition would have a positive effect on cultural and historical resources by securing and managing them in public ownership. Under the Montana Antiquities Act (§ 22-3-433, MCA), all state agencies are required to consult with the SHPO on the identification and location of heritage properties on lands owned by the state, which may be adversely impacted by a proposed action or development project. This acquisition would provide a critical buffer to the National Historic Landmark properties, helping to ensure their preservation.

No Action: If the parcels were sold to a private party, it is unknown if or at what level historic sites would be affected. However, residential and/or commercial development could lead to degradation of these important resources.

3.10 Community and Taxes

All of these parcels are located within the unincorporated community of Lolo. Since Lolo is unincorporated, an estimation of population of the immediate area is difficult to define, but the population of the Lolo/Woodman area is estimated to be 3,800 people.

A high percentage of Lolo residents commute to Missoula for work, although agriculture, education, timber and service industries also provide local employment.

Property taxes assessed on the parcels total \$2,168 per year, based on Missoula County's current tax assessment.

Proposed Action: The proposed acquisition of the parcels is not expected to have any negative affects to the community of Lolo or other western Montana communities. With visitation at more than 20,000 annually and rising, Travelers' Rest State Park provides an economic stimulus for the Lolo community. The acquisition of these parcels would be expected to increase the opportunity for economic benefit for the community.

The proposed acquisition by FWP would also address several needs identified by the 2002 Lolo Regional Plan:

- "the community needs more parks for active recreation, conservation and historic preservation and interpretation"
- "the public has identified access to Lolo Creek and the Bitterroot River for fishing and recreation opportunities as desired goals"
- "Public acquisition of additional parklands could be considered in areas that are in need of recreation sites and cultural preservation, such as the Travelers' Rest National Historic Landmark"
- "Include areas of cultural resource and linear connections into a parks system through land acquisition, lease, donation, or in partnership with federal and state agencies, private individuals or organizations"
- "Establish linear parkways that connect important cultural and natural resources"

Purchase of these parcels by FWP would essentially eliminate future residential or commercial development of the property and potential revenues to the county that would have resulted. However, preclusion of residential and/or commercial development would also save the county from having to provide services (schools, infrastructure such as roads and maintenance, etc.) to newly developed areas.

The actual amount of property taxes paid to the County is not expected to change. FWP is required by state law to make tax payments to counties equal to the amount that a private landowner would be required to pay per § 87-1-603, MCA.

No Action: If the property were to remain under current use for agriculture, taxes paid to the County would likely remain the same as they are now. If the parcels were sold and used for

residential and/or commercial development, the amount of tax revenue paid to the County could be higher than the current level but the exact amount of change is difficult to predict at this time and would depend on plans/management by potential future landowner

3.11 Cumulative Impacts

Proposed Action: The proposed purchase would contribute to the long-term preservation of the Travelers' Rest National Historic Landmark, while increasing recreational opportunities for the residents of Lolo and west-central Montana. The addition of the visitor center and museum would establish Travelers' Rest State Park as a year-round destination for area residents and visitors to the area, increasing park visitation, interpretive programming and economic opportunity for the unincorporated community.

The long-term protection of the riparian area along Lolo Creek would assist in any future fisheries habitat restoration activities initiated by FWP or other partners and cooperators to improve habitat quality for native trout populations, as well as other aquatic and terrestrial species.

With proposed trail expansion within the park, Lolo neighborhoods would be better connected, providing alternate and safer routes to Lolo School and area residents with a quality outdoor recreational experience.

Additionally, State Parks in Montana provide significant economic benefits to local communities, and Travelers' Rest is no different. A survey of state park visitors in 2010 found that visitors to all Montana State Parks contributed \$289 million annually to Montana's economy, with nonresident spending creating 1,600 jobs statewide. In FWP Region 2, nonresidents spent more than \$22 million in 2010 and created nearly 300 jobs.

No Action: The implementation of the No Action alternative would eliminate these parcels from the broader development plans for Travelers' Rest State Park and jeopardize future preservation efforts for the riparian area or native grassland restoration projects. It may also require FWP to eventually construct a new visitor center at the park. The No Action alternative would impact public access to Lolo Creek and forego linking the park to existing nonmotorized trails in the community.

If the parcels were sold to private buyers, their existing natural resource values could be impacted if the parcels were developed for residences and/or businesses. Wildlife movement may change to navigate around newly developed sites.

Public access into the parcels and on to adjoining public lands could be allowed, altered or prohibited. Predicting potential long-term changes to the parcels' management under private ownership is not possible.

4.0 RESOURCE ISSUES CONSIDERED BUT ELIMINATED FROM DETAILED ANALYSIS

The Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) provides for the identification and elimination from detailed study of issues, which are not significant or which have been covered by a prior environmental review, narrowing the discussion of these issues to a brief explanation of why they would not have a significant effect on the physical or human environment or providing a reference to their coverage elsewhere (Administrative Rules of Montana 12.2.434(d)). While the following resources are important, FWP anticipates they would be unaffected by the proposed action or if there are any effects, those influences could be adequately mitigated, and therefore these resources were eliminated from further detailed analysis.

4.1 Risk and Health Hazards

As part of FWP's due diligence, the Department would complete a hazardous materials survey prior to the property's acquisition.

5.0 NEED FOR AN ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

Based on the significance criteria evaluated in this EA, is an EIS required? No. Based upon the above assessment of the Proposed Action, which has identified a limited number of minor impacts which can be mitigated, an EIS is not required and an Environmental Assessment is the appropriate level of review.

6.0 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

6.1 Public Involvement

Planning for the preservation and development of Travelers' Rest State Park has involved many different phases of public involvement, beginning with a design charrette held in the Lolo community in 1999, a full two years before the park was established.

The Traveler's Rest State Park Management Direction (Appendix B) was the result of two years of public involvement following the original 15-acre acquisition in 2001. Additional acquisitions in 2002, 2003, 2004 and 2005 were all part of the public process, with the parcels in question in this current EA document identified as crucial to achieving the overall goals of the park.

Additionally, this acquisition has been vetted through the Missoula County Open Space Bond process, with presentations by FWP and Five Valleys Land Trust at Open Space Land Committee meetings on February 2 and 16, 2012. The result of those meetings was a unanimous recommendation to fund up to 30% of the appraised land value. Subsequently, the project was reviewed and approved at a public meeting by the Missoula County Board of Commissioners on March 28, 2012.

Current Environmental Assessment:

Public notification of the EA release and opportunities to comment would be by:

- A statewide press release;
- Two legal notices in each of these newspapers: *Independent Record* (Helena), *Missoulian*, and *Ravalli Republic* (Hamilton);
- Direct mailing to adjacent landowners and interested parties;
- Public notice and posting the EA on the Fish, Wildlife & Parks web page: <http://fwp.mt.gov> ("Public Notices").

Copies of this EA will be available for public review at FWP Headquarters in Helena, the State Library, Region 2 Headquarters in Missoula, Travelers' Rest State Park in Lolo, and on the FWP web site.

This level of public notice and participation is appropriate for a project of this scope having few and limited physical and human impacts.

6.2 Duration of Comment Period

The public comment period will extend for thirty (30) days beginning April 20, 2012. Written comments will be accepted by FWP until 5:00 p.m. on May 21, 2012 and can be mailed to the address below:

Travelers' Rest State Park
Attn: Loren Flynn
PO Box 995
Lolo, MT 59847

or email comments to: LFlynn2@mt.gov

or phone comments to: 406-273-4253

6.3 Timeline of Events

Draft EA public comment period	April 20 to May 21, 2012
FWP Commission for final approval	June or July meeting
MT Land Board for approval	After final funding is secured from private sources

6.4 Offices/Programs Contacted or Contributing to This Document:

Missoula County Assessor Office
Montana County Office of Rural Initiatives, Missoula
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks:
 Lands Bureau, Helena
 Legal Bureau, Helena

Parks Division, Helena and Missoula
Wildlife and Fisheries Division, Missoula
Montana Natural Heritage Program, Species of Concern database
Natural Resources Conservation Service Web Soil Survey
US Department of Agriculture, Soil Survey Database
US Fish and Wildlife Service, Wetlands Database

7.0 EA PREPARATION

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Lee Bastian, Region 2 Parks Manager, FWP, Missoula
Kristi DuBois, Nongame Wildlife Biologist, FWP, Missoula
Ladd Knotek, Fisheries Biologist, Region 2 FWP, Missoula
Sara Scott, FWP Heritage Resources Specialist, Lolo
Darlene Edge, Lands Agent, FWP, Helena
Beth Shumate, FWP Trails Grant Coordinator, Helena
Jack Lynch, Legal Counsel, FWP, Helena

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